



FEMA

STRENGTHENING DISASTER RECOVERY FOR THE NATION



Strengthening Disaster Recovery for the Nation

VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (VTC)

Region VI

Time: October 20, 2009, Tuesday, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM (Central)

Participating Locations: FEMA Region VI, Arkansas,
Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Participation Via: VTCs, phone bridge (only) and participating through WebEx

Sectors Represented: Federal and State agencies, nonprofits and private sector and Tribal representation

Note: This product is provided as a general summary only, not a transcript of the discussion.

Region VI VTC Summary

Denton, Texas
October 20, 2009

Sixteen (16) questions were presented to those participating in the VTC process for comment. Region VI selected six (6) of the 16 questions to address as a group using a combination of Round Robin and group discussion. Questions addressed were: Q6, Q1, Q4, Q13, Q15 and Q16 (in that order). Participants were directed to the Web site to address the remaining questions.

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

NOTE: Responses are by questions posed and are noted using the same sequencing as the VTC.

Q6: What are the appropriate State, local and Tribal roles in leading disaster recovery efforts?

- Region VI participants, when considering roles, said that **pre-set recovery teams** need to be identified and the State needs to **assist local planning**. They discussed the value in a **Federal Executive Board coordinator** in-place, assets and decision makers identified to cue response.
- They also said:
 - We need to be an **advocate** for locals.
 - Local **expectations** need to be appropriately managed.
 - Use **State Web sites** as resource for Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR), including Tribal resources.
 - This initiative (developing a framework for long-term recovery) **goes beyond** *Stafford Act*.
- Participants discussed **limits** and **resources** noting that all Long-Term Recovery (LTR) efforts are in the context of available dollars and in their view, LTR moves beyond the *Stafford Act*. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) gets supplemental dollars. With regard to limits discussions centered around **authorities** and **conceptual timeframes**:
 - *Stafford Act* limits.
 - *What are limits of Long-Term Recovery? How far do we go?*
- Participants noted that after considering funding resources, the second step of LTR depends on local and State input to develop a **tailored response**. They see recovery to be in three (3) phases: Response, assessment and LTR programs. It looks something like this:

RESPONSE	ASSESSMENT	LTR PROGRAMS
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- They see the State having the **primary role** in one (RESPONSE) and two (ASSESSMENT) and the Federal role happening at LTR programs.

- Participants said disasters have **enduring economic impacts** making it a challenge to define an endpoint.

Q1: How would you define a successful disaster recovery?

- Participants feel **local governments** define success and that recoveries are locally led with Federal support. Other responses, for the most part, can be grouped by what is visible and how communities need us to help them with their recoveries.

WHAT IS VISIBLE

- **Rebuilding** enables people to see their future.
- Reestablishing **tax base**, inclusive of other items not currently included, enables governments to continue.
- Redefining what making “**whole**” means: *Will recovery restore (buildings, networks, infrastructure, etc.) to today’s level of service or to pre-disaster conditions?*
- Repairing **critical infrastructure** is necessary for other sectors (economy, public services, etc.) to recover.
- Continuity of services.

WHAT COMMUNITIES NEED US TO DO

- Communities sometimes need **technical assistance** to plan recoveries and coordinate resources.
- Federal agencies might strive to do a better job in providing concrete and detailed examples of ways communities can work through the long-term recovery process. The recovery process is long and tortuous enough without avoidable “re-inventions of the wheel.” The examples could serve as useful templates for planning and action even if local partners ultimately decide to do things in quite different ways. Federal technical assistance, especially when it relates to funding resources, should be as upfront and as clear as possible regarding procedural and performance rules that, by law, must be followed. That is not to stifle creativity or local priorities, rather it is to avoid time delays, planning discontinuities, and ill-will among partners. Davis-Bacon wage requirements, Fair Housing Laws, public notice and hearing requirements, etc. are among the things that must be considered in order for plans to be truly viable. The technical assistance examples should show how they could further long-range recovery objectives **and** meet program compliance requirements.

WHAT COMMUNITIES NEED TO DO

- Define who the **victims are**.

EXPECTATIONS FOR RECOVERY

- Participants noted expectations need to be **managed** during recovery planning and evaluation.
- **No program** can make things whole.
- And there is **no real** full recovery.
- Individual Assistance (IA) has an **18-month target** in which to get their work done. However, Public Assistance (PA) and mitigation take a long-time (emphasis intended).

- Region VI participants identified an important philosophical question: *Why does it take a disaster to do this?* They expressed that disasters help communities **overcome inertia** and that **recovery does not equal restoration**.

After large-scale disasters we usually should be talking about Recovery rather than Restoration. The terms are not synonymous. “Recovery” is returning things to a normal condition, as distinct from “Restoration” which is “bringing things back to their original state of being.” Returning to normal means regaining the fundamental capacity of self-sustainability and the ability to effectively re-join the challenges of everyday life. Recovery should be the primary long-term goal. Restoration should be the “goals of opportunity” that we strive to achieve, when practical and/or desirable, as all partners go forward with recovery efforts. For example, in some cases a disaster may have the effect of disrupting inertia and making it feasible to re-build structures that are more resilient against future disasters.

- They also identified that recovery stakeholders and governing authorities need **expanded knowledge** of other programs (beyond typical Stafford).

Q4: How would you measure progress and what specific metrics should be considered for a successful disaster recovery?

- Participants suggested that:
 - Recovery stakeholders and victims **meet timelines**, be **realistic** about expected outcomes. They noted that timelines can differ with focused (tornado) vs. widespread (hurricane) disasters. Resource providers (FEMA as well as others) need to be **accountable** to timelines, too.
 - **Expectations** be better managed. For example:
 - The goal for rebuilding critical infrastructure should be **100 percent**.
 - **Housing** (and other functional areas) have different goals. And the **private sector** may have different goals yet again.
 - Goals need to be **measurable**.
 - **Locals** need to be involved in:
 - Identifying short- and long-term **projects**.
 - The establishment of **metrics** by which to measure recovery success.
 - Community **self-sufficiency** is a metric.
 - Other observations include:
 - Recovery stakeholders need an **understanding (locally) of funding** timelines from resource providers.
 - Outside resource providers need to speak **frankly** and **directly** with locals.

Q13: What unmet needs are common to most disasters that do not seem to be adequately addressed under the current systems and programs?

- **Stabilization** of the **post-disaster tax base** is a big issue.

- **Fitting needs to resources.** Some individual needs **do not easily fit** in existing programs.
- **Housing.** Emergency housing is a **priority** issue: both temporary and permanent. Some participants feel it is the number one issue.
- **Relationships and Partnerships.** Participants recommend building stronger partnerships beyond current ones.
- **Funding.** Funding is needed beyond the *Stafford Act*.
- **Mitigation.** Recovery leadership needs to take a longer view.
- **Disaster host states** those “receiving” displaced disaster victims:
 - Need more support.
 - Perhaps their own *Declaration*?
- **Assistance to industrial and agricultural base** is insufficient. More resources are needed.
- **Rural transportation issues.**
- Assistance is needed for **local employers** and **Small Businesses Administration (SBA)** needs more resources.
- **Small community planning assistance.** Participants want to see a “better” Emergency Support Function (ESF) #14 to address that need.
- **Food delivery.**
- **Housing.** Recovery leadership at all levels needs to better define our abilities and requirements for housing clearly to local community.
- **Self-sufficiency.** Participants want to see local areas restored so they can provide for themselves — especially in rural areas.

Participants also see opportunity when discussing unmet needs: Recovering communities need to better **leverage** resources.

Q15: What are best practices for integrating mitigation and resilience into recovery?

- Participants expressed that one particular state has **good linkage** between mitigation and recovery initiatives and noted the success of the two states’ recovery authorities’ success!
- They also noted that mitigation is a best practices permanent action but has limited visibility impact. Efforts need local buy-in to be successful.
- They want to see:

- Local governments in a position to **quickly** decide on mitigation opportunities.
 - LTR and PA funding to address needs **beyond immediate** ones.
 - Project Worksheets (PWs) include **mitigation** and think it is beneficial for mitigation specialists to **review** PWs and have an expanded early role. Some participants are frustrated with the PA and IA funding processes, feeling that they **inhibit** getting measurable results on the ground.
 - A better definition of **resiliency**.
 - HUD disaster recovery teams in Region 6 **mitigation trained** and ready to go.
 - Recovery leadership, planners and stakeholders **resist the temptation** to stick to *Stafford Act* only programs. And HUD cross-program training related to LTR.
 - **Flexibility** for cities with new programs.
 - The **involvement** of faith-based and community organizations in mitigation efforts.
 - The construction of **community safe rooms** encouraged.
 - **Local staff** with
 - good local knowledge.
- Housing task force concept.

Q16: What else would you like us to know?

Participants expressed that:

- State and local recovery authorities need to know about programs and timelines beforehand. Some times they are unaware of money and other resources available to them.
- They would like to see a single clearinghouse for funding.
- It is all about the dollars — getting funding to address recovery needs and implement recovery projects.
- We need to better define and differentiate between “national” and “Federal.” *What is “national” vs. “Federal”?*
- We need to hear from local levels on the front end of this process.
- Need to empower States to do more with control.
- Recovery needs to be less of a Federal process and more of a State and local one.
- The Department of Energy has a big role in response. Their role in recovery needs to be defined.
- We need to better understand, appreciate and leverage the private sector relationships to LTR interdependencies.
- One particular state can model well; they need to do it quicker.
- Inspector Gen. Moses.
- PA and Hazard Mitigation need to be streamlined.
- PA technology should be used to crosscheck and reduce fraud.
- State and local governments need code enforcement.
- Power and H₂O are keys to recovery.
- PA has problems with guidance and experience, too.
- Recovery teams need to include locals with local knowledge.
- Local cultural and language barriers need to be addressed.
- Some States have had success with managing expectations.
- Current economic situation undermines the ability of some agencies to function.
- The dynamic working relationships with the Tribes have current shortcomings.
- *When are people coming back to the new poles/power?*

- Communication is a critical issue, within the Department and across stakeholders. Workers in Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) should not hear of new initiatives or Administration decisions from evacuees. What is announced on CNN or other major news outlets is not heard in DRCs. There are no televisions and no one has time to watch if there were.
- Even with pre-trained disaster teams, it is extremely important that the Regional and Field Offices are advised of persons detailed to work in the disaster area or sheltering community. Field Offices have working relationships with Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) and FEMA officials. Their communication with FEMA and other partners is vital to avoid confusion, duplication and misinformation.

PROCESSES

Participants said we need:

- To seek efficiencies of program delivery.
- To also seek efficiencies of mitigation programs.
- A comprehensive view/R.F. Law is needed.
- To identify gaps in funding and information about programs.
- Involve the private sector with stakeholders meetings.
- Bring the insurance industry to the table.
- Involve small business associations.
- Focus on the economic and social aspects of LTR.
- Simplify and shorten long processes. Interest is lost with long processes.
- Understand what is keeping people from coming back. Understanding history helps with the establishment of metrics.
- Integrated resiliency and mitigation in programs.
- Short-term tasks.
- Those who screen evacuees at the front door of disaster recovery centers should be trained to tell clients how the process works. Evacuees do not understand the necessity of applying for an SBA loan unless someone tells them it is required in order to complete the process to qualify for assistance. They often think it is for a business loan or know they have insufficient income to meet a debt service and skip this step. If they do not stop at the SBA table, they never know of this requirement and delay their eligibility determination for assistance in repairing their home.
- Perhaps in order to reduce costs, evacuees are not provided information on the availability of support of hotel costs. When out of money and faced with living in a shelter, elderly evacuees may choose to live in their car. Unless they ask for assistance with hotel costs, this information is not offered. Whether this is still managed by the Red Cross, not HUD, it must still be considered and addressed.